



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

JUN 10 2022

From: Secretary of the Navy
To: CAPT Stewart Bateshansky, USN

Subj: SECRETARIAL LETTER OF CENSURE

Ref: (a) RDML (b) (6) [REDACTED], USN ltr 5830 of 4 Jun 21
(b) Joint Publication 3-02, Amphibious Operations, dtd 4 Jan 19
(c) JAGMAN 0114a

1. Reference (a) is the investigation into the July 30, 2020, fatal Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) sinking that resulted in the tragic deaths of eight Marines and one Sailor. The fatal sinking occurred while the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the MAKIN ISLAND Amphibious Ready Group, which included USS SOMERSET (LPD 25), were conducting integrated training off the coast of Southern California. On the day of the tragedy, you were serving as the Commander, Amphibious Task Force (CATF) for the exercise.

2. Per reference (a), as the CATF, you were responsible for approving the overall operation and overseeing your subordinates' execution of the operation. While the investigation opined that you acted prudently in your decision to reduce the complexity of the day by cancelling a scheduled underway replenishment and that none of USS SOMERSET's actions or inactions caused the sinking, it ultimately found that there were gaps and seams in the planning of the exercise at issue as well as its execution, all of which were within your span of control as the CATF. The confirmation brief that you approved left doubt in the minds of subordinate commanders with respect to the authority to abort or delay the AAV launch from the beach. Furthermore, the operational risk management procedures used for the exercise confirmation brief did not identify all significant hazards of AAV waterborne operations, including material casualties, loss of communications, and the potential for an AAV to sink.

3. Commanders are responsible for the proper execution of duties and performance of their subordinates and you failed to do so. Accordingly, you are hereby censured.

4. A copy of this letter will be placed in your official service record per reference (c). You may forward within 15 days of receipt of this letter a rebuttal consistent with reference (c), for inclusion in your official record, if you so desire.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Carlos Del Toro".

Carlos Del Toro